



Good looks and a green thumb may not be all you got from your grandma. Hundreds of health concerns are passed on through genetics, including cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke and diabetes. Tracing your medical family tree can help you and your doctor recognize, and even fend off, inheritable illnesses in the early stages, says Dr. Paula Yoon, epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S. "We're bombarded with so much health information and it keeps changing," says Yoon. "I'm sure at some point people just throw up their hands." Knowing what your genes may have in store for you can help you focus on relevant concerns and motivate you to make healthy lifestyle changes.

To learn about your family's medical history, ask your siblings, parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents. Chart the age at which they developed illnesses and enquire about how and when deceased family members died. Then, work with your doctor to include relevant information in your family's medical files. The Canadian Genealogy Centre website at [cgc-ccg.archives.ca](http://cgc-ccg.archives.ca) can help you research health records of any long-lost relatives.

Just because your father has diabetes doesn't mean you'll get it too, but statistically, your odds of developing the disease are increased. While you can't change your genes, you can change your habits to increase your chances of a healthy future. — Karen Eull